

Grant Approval Memo



Grantee: Special Education Service Agency
Request Amount: \$110,000.00
Project Title: SESA's Low Incidence Disability Outreach Program Evaluation
Grant Term: 9/1/2026 to 8/31/2027
Trust Staff: Tina Voelker-Ross

Staff Analysis:

- What does this project do?
Trust funds will support a consultant to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of SESA's Low Incidence Disabilities Outreach Program, including a program effectiveness review, an economic impact analysis, and multi-stage sustainability planning. The consultant will work with SESA's Board and administration to assess current service delivery, identify gaps created by rising referrals, and develop long-term operational adjustments that strengthen technical assistance for educators, families, and Trust beneficiaries statewide. The work will directly inform updates to SESA's business plan and plan of operations.
- Who is receiving the funds?
SESA is a statewide public organization established in Alaska Statute (AS 14.30.600–14.30.650) to provide specialized consultative services to rural and rural-remote school districts serving students ages 3–22 with low-incidence disabilities—conditions affecting roughly 1% of school-aged children, including autism, emotional disabilities, deaf-blindness, and multiple disabilities. SESA's education specialists offer no-cost onsite training, distance support, and technical assistance to school teams and families, ensuring access to qualified expertise regardless of location.
- Why is staff recommending this project?
Referrals to SESA have increased even as statewide school enrollment has declined, resulting in waitlists in multiple program areas. Because SESA's core funding is tied to average daily enrollment, decreasing enrollment has constrained resources despite rising demand from rural districts. Though recent legislation (HB 246) increased the minimum allocation per student, funding challenges persist. A full evaluation is needed to help SESA determine how to maintain a sustainable system of care, strengthen operations, and meet the growing needs of Trust beneficiaries with developmental disabilities, mental illness, traumatic brain injuries, and complex low-incidence conditions in communities where services are limited.
- Will this be a multi-year project?
No. This is a one-time, one-year request that will generate critical information and planning tools to support long-term sustainability.

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Trust Five Year Funding History

No Trust grants within this time period.

Comp Plan - Area of Focus	Strategic Priority Area
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	Priority 1: Prevention & Early Intervention

Project Description (from grant application)

In 1986, SESA's Low Incidence Disabilities Outreach Program was formed to offer rural and rural remote Alaskans access to special education teachers with formal training and professional teaching experience with students who have low incidence disabilities (AS 14.30.600 – 14.30.650). Low Incidence Disabilities are rare and impact less than 1% of school-aged children. Alaska rural and rural remote school districts struggle to recruit and retain special education teachers. It is uncommon for special education teachers to have professional training and experience teaching students with low incidence disabilities. Since SESA's inception, through trainings, on-site work, and distance delivery, SESA education specialists have used their knowledge and experience to help Alaska's school districts meet students' unique educational needs. This consulting is provided at no cost to the local school due to funding received by the State of Alaska. Despite the average daily membership of students in public schools dropping in the past few years, SESA has seen a rise in referrals from rural Alaskan School districts. This demonstrates a continued need within the Alaska public schools for SESA services but presents a strain on available specialists, for Trust beneficiaries, and their community members seeking training and guidance on how to set up an Individual Education Plan for the school year for individuals with low incidence disabilities. SESA's current business plan and plan of operations limits the number of students and school teams that can be assigned to one specialist due to the number of onsite visits available to the school teams each school year. As a result of the limit of specialists and the increase in referrals received, there has been a waitlist for 2 out of the 5 LID programs in the past two fiscal years. A program evaluation is needed to guide the SESA Board of Directors and SESA Administration on determining how to strengthen and maintain a sustainable system of care for the Trust beneficiaries receiving support from this program.

The following partnership grant request would fund consultant expenses to conduct a program evaluation, economic impact analysis and sustainability planning for the Low Incidence Outreach Program. The highly qualified consultant selected would be expected to work with the SESA Board of Directors and SESA administration to gather data on the current system, evaluate the program's effectiveness, and provide recommendations on how to capitalize on funds available to the agency. SESA would offer in kind support with personnel costs of the assigned SESA administrator. The qualified consultant would be expected to support them in a multi-stage sustainability planning project for the LID program that includes:

1. Conduct a program evaluation to identify strengths, opportunities and impacts on families, educators, and schools.
2. Conduct an economic impact analysis to determine the LID program value to the state of Alaska.

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3. Business/operations planning to understand how similar agencies fund themselves and identify feasibly of other options to support service delivery.

Grantee Proposed Evaluation Measures (from grant application)

Performance Measure 1: Given program evaluation results, SESA Administration will revise the business plan and plan of operations to increase available technical assistance for educators, trust beneficiaries and their family members with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and traumatic brain injuries ages 3 to 22.

Performance Measure 2: Upon multi-state sustainability planning project completion, SESA Board of Directors and Administration will select and implement at least 2 new opportunities for trust beneficiaries, family members and Alaskan educators within the next fiscal year.

Proposed Project Performance Measures (developed by the Trust)

Provide a narrative describing the timeline, activities, successes, and challenges during SESA's program evaluation conducted through consultative services. Be sure to include an electronic copy of the evaluation provided by the consultant, as well as details and outcomes from the following activities:

- a. Evaluation of program effectiveness.
- b. Economic impact analysis.
- c. Identification of opportunities to strengthen service delivery.
- d. Identification of long-term strategies to maintain a sustainable system of care for Trust beneficiaries.
- e. Updates to SESA's business plan and operations.

Sustainability (from grant application)

The results of this project will be used for SESA Board of Directors and Administration to make informed decision making when looking at revising our business plan, plan of operations and improving the system of care during this economic climate as we are directed to address (AS 14.30.600 – 14.30.650). Information will be used to guide leadership on how to strengthen their system of care to build local capacity of special education staff working with students with low incidence disabilities. The need for additional funding to complete this project after the project start and end date is not anticipated.

Who We Serve (from grant application)

Special Education Service Agency provides consultative services to all Alaskans in rural and rural remote schools serving children age 3 to 22 with unique needs (e.g., autism, deaf and hard of hearing, emotional disabilities, deaf blindness, multiple disabilities) which occur in 1% of the school-aged population. There are several examples of the impact of SESA Education Specialists consultative services for Trust beneficiaries. Our Vision Education Specialist connected children who are blind or with low vision and their school teams with lesson on how to read and write through Braille. Several of our Multiple Disabilities Education Specialists connected children who are nonverbal with Alternative and Augmentative Communication Devices.

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They followed up with family members and school staff with training on how to introduce the low tech and high tech for the child to access it throughout his or her school day. Our Emotional Disabilities Education Specialists have supported school teams with teaching strategies and guided evaluations for students with emotional disabilities to positively access their education program. Our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Specialist connects family members, students and school staff to communication mode information and resources (e.g., American Sign Language courses). Our Autism Education Specialists have received numerous requests for support in the school on both academic and life skills training. SESA education specialists travel to every corner of Alaska. In 2023-2024 school year, the LID program completed 185 trips to rural and rural remote Alaskan schools. In 2024-2025 school year, the LID program completed 168 trips to schools. This current school year, the LID program completed 185 trips to urban, rural and rural remote Alaskan schools. The LID staff have the opportunity and responsibility to share their knowledge with the children and educators assigned to teach them. Alaskan schools and family members can depend on SESA to offer neutral, evidence based or best practice recommendations for within their training and consultations at no cost to them. This provides families and Trust beneficiaries with developmental disabilities access to highly qualified special education teachers available for consultations regardless of their location in the state of Alaska.

Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)

Developmental Disabilities:	434
Secondary Beneficiaries (family members or caregivers providing support to primary beneficiaries):	209
Number of people to be trained	12

Project Budget (from grant application)

Personnel Services Costs	\$0.00
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	\$8,503.00
Personnel Services Narrative	A portion of SESA Executive Director's FTE (\$8,503) to supervise Low Incidence Disabilities Outreach Program will be used to work with consultant on data collection during the three phases across the 12 months of this project.

Other Costs	\$110,000.00
Other Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Other Costs Narrative	Consulting fees for the 12 month multi-stage sustainability planning project. Project Start-Up & Ongoing Management (August, Ongoing) = \$7,500 Deliverables: Kick-off meeting with project team; Review of prior evaluations, audits, and available program data; written monthly updates and status meetings

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"Process Design" for \$4000 with Deliverables: Evaluation Plan, Impact Analysis Framework, Sustainability planning framework, and Finalized workplan & timeline.

LID Program Evaluation (August - December 2026) = \$40,000
Deliverables: Evaluation Plan, Impact analysis framework, Sustainability planning framework, Finalized workplan & timeline

Economic Impact Analysis (August - December 2026) = \$28,500
Deliverables: Collection and analysis of data; hosting reflection session of preliminary findings, evaluation report

Sustainability Planning (November - June 2027) = \$30,000
Deliverables: Impact Analysis, Infographic or other visual summary of key findings (for external sharing); Process Report detailing the model and assumptions

Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

Special Education Service Agency (PENDING)	\$8,503.00
Total Leveraged Funds	\$8,503.00